



Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

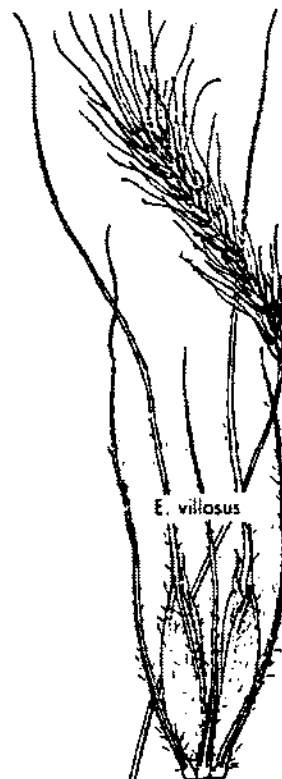
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
Route 135
Westborough, MA 01581
(508) 792-7270 ext. 200

MASSACHUSETTS THREATENED PLANTS

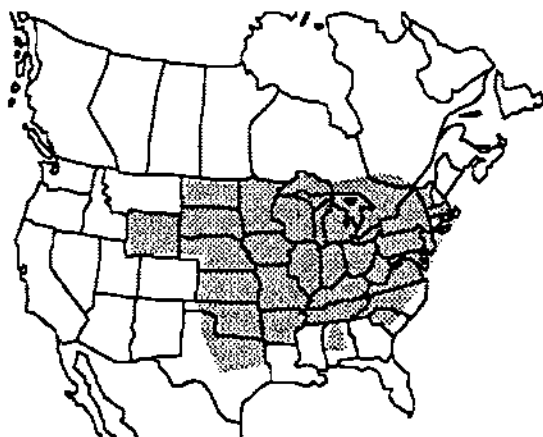
HAIRY WILD RYE
(*Elymus villosus* Muhl. ex Willd.)

Description

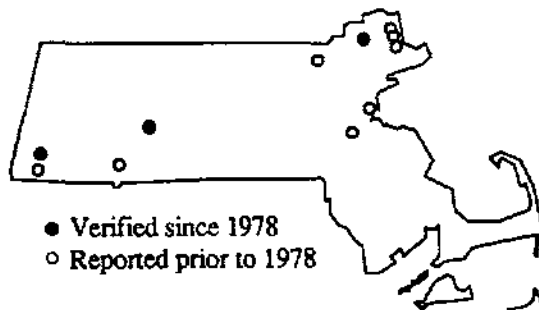
Hairy Wild Rye--an erect, native perennial in the Grass family (Graminae or Poaceae)--gets its name from the upper surfaces of its leaf blades, which are villose (covered in fine, long hairs). These blades are only 6-10 mm (1/4 - 2/5 in.) wide and are thin in texture. The leaf sheathes (lower portions of the blades that enclose the stem) are hairy, as well. Hairy Wild Rye grows in tufts 8-12 dm (2 1/2 - 4 ft.) high. The stems, or culms, grow in small tufts and are topped by an elongate terminal spike, which has a very bristly appearance. These bristles are actually the awns, or long terminal bristles on the bracts of the tiny flowers. The straight or nearly straight awns are 1-3 cm (2/5 - 1 1/5 in) long. The spikelets (the basic flowering units in grasses) generally occur in pairs and mature from mid-July to mid-August.



Gleason, H.A. The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the US & Adjacent Canada. NY Botanical Garden, 1952.



Documented Range of Hairy
Wild Rye



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Range

The range of Hairy Wild Rye has been documented as occurring from Quebec and Vermont to North Dakota, and south to North Carolina and Texas.

Similar Species

Hairy Wild Rye could be mistaken for Canada Wild-rye (*Elymus canadensis*). However, the leaves of Canada Wild-rye tend to be wider--usually 8-20 mm (8/25 - 20/25 in.) wide. Furthermore, the leaves of Canada Wild-rye are thick, hard, and either hairless or only slightly hairy.

Habitats in Massachusetts

Habitats of *E. villosus* in Massachusetts include floodplain forests and a rich mesic forest on alluvial silt, located at the edge of a tidally influenced creek. Associated plant species include Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*), Basswood (*Tilia americana*), and various elms (*Ulmus* spp.) and sedges (*Carex* spp.). These sites are flooded occasionally to rarely.

Population Status

Hairy Wild Rye is presently listed as "Threatened" in Massachusetts where there are three current stations (discovered or relocated since 1978) and eight historical stations (unverified since 1978). All current stations are in western Massachusetts. Hairy Wild Rye is also considered to be rare in North Carolina, Vermont and Wyoming.